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Convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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II. Replies received from Member States

Cuba

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[18 August 2000]

The Government of the Republic of Cuba wishes to reiterate the positions stated in notes it previously sent to the Secretary-General in pursuance of resolutions 52/38 J and 53/77 E.

We commend the efforts of the international community to combat illicit trade in small arms and light weapons although we continue to think that it would be more effective if, at the appropriate time, we were to attack the problem of illicit traffic in all kinds of weapons.

Criminal activities in the arms trade generally follow a common pattern regardless of the type of weapon involved in that they are manufactured and trafficked in violation of arms control laws and regulations.

Cuba is not unaware that there are various categories of weapons with their distinctive specifications and characteristics that must be taken into account in conducting an analysis such as the Conference intends to undertake, but due regard should be paid to the common pattern to which I referred and the need to seek more efficient and effective global solutions.

It is essential to honour the mandate conferred on the Conference by the General Assembly with regard to the scope of the Conference, namely, "Illicit trade in all its aspects", since we feel that the more the debate deviates from that mandate, the more difficult it will be to achieve widely accepted results.

It is undeniable that while small arms and light weapons are major agents in some internal conflicts, with their known disastrous effect on the civilians of those areas, they also constitute an important component of the self-defence of many countries. In accordance with that principle, States have a legitimate right to acquire and possess such arms.

Consequently, the United Nations Conference on illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects should adhere to the principle that legal traffic in such arms deserves the same respect as the principles enshrined in the Charter.

Cuba considers that States have a vital role to play in dealing with illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

While the United Nations unquestionably has a responsibility to adopt global means at the international level, it is the responsibility of the States to serve as the chief actors in the regulation and control of the weapons they possess.

It is up to the authorities of each country to assume primary responsibility for taking the most appropriate measures to regulate and control arms in their respective territories. Logically, every State is sovereign, and equally entitled to the help it requires to perform those functions and the international community should search for a way or the mechanisms by which to ensure that such assistance will be available when requested. Cuba is prepared to cooperate in exploring such ways and means.

On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the fact that we are living in an unequal world in which the different phenomena facing mankind today take different forms from one region to another, as well as from one country to another, and that not all countries share the same political, economic, social and cultural conditions in coping with the problem of the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons so that the attempt to apply uniform solutions to such diverse scenarios could be counter-productive.

Small arms and light weapons constitute the sole means of defence of most countries in the world and for some States, they are simply one more category of weapons in their arsenal, which includes weapons of mass destruction.

This implies that the impact of this type of weapons on the national security concerns of each country is different.

It would be irresponsible not to acknowledge that reality.

As Cuba sees it, the 2001 Conference will be the framework for agreement on formulas that instead of sharpening mistrust among States, will help to promote international cooperation in the struggle against the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

The Conference will have to find a way for States to exchange useful information voluntarily to cope with illicit traffic; it will have to set off a bilateral and multilateral dialogue among neighbouring States seeking regional solutions with a view to reaching mutually beneficial agreements.

States will have to pledge that they will not adopt any restrictive trade measures that impede the transfer of useful technologies aimed at combating illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

The Conference should propose global measures which can later be adapted to regional and subregional conditions and situations.

Above all, the Conference will have to promote a regional and subregional approach to the problem of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons capable of providing more effective measures suited to the distinctive characteristics of each region or subregion.

The Conference should reach out to the various existing regional and subregional institutions and suggest initiatives they can take to implement the recommendations of the Conference at a later stage by taking more specific measures.

At the same time, Cuba wishes to reiterate its position to the effect that unless we deal in depth with the causes of underdevelopment and poverty, we will fail to arrive at stable and lasting solutions to the problem of illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

Consequently, the 2001 Conference should adopt concrete measures to ensure that the resources released by disarmament are channelled to the development of the underdeveloped countries, primarily those emerging from armed conflicts.